

## The Problem of Homosexuality: Desire-in-Uneasiness, Friendship, Family, Freedom

Brian Bergen-Aurand, [brian@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:brian@ntu.edu.sg)

Volume 5.1 (2015) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2015.124 | <http://cinej.pitt.edu>

### Abstract

Zenne Dancer is a 2011 Turkish film written by Caner Alper and directed by Alper and Mehmet Binay. It is inspired by the story of Ahmet Yıldız, a gay Kurdish Turk allegedly murdered by his father in 2008 for dishonoring his family. Through its depiction of the unlikely friendship between three men, the film addresses the problem of homosexuality, the desire-in-uneasiness evoked by men being together, and the complex social structures of honor killings. In its address of honor killings, Zenne Dancer follows in a prestigious line of some of the best of Turkish and world cinema. The film depicts heteropatriarchy as a system harmful to women and men, and shows men and women enforcing and resisting that harm. In the end, Zenne Dancer connects these thematic concerns through a mixture of realist story, dance video, daydream, fairytale, and melodrama in a film ultimately concerned with the care of the self and the meaning of liberation.

**Keywords:** Zenne Dancer, Friendship, Homosexuality, Power, Honor Killing, Rumi



New articles in this journal are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 United States License.



This journal is published by the [University Library System](#) of the [University of Pittsburgh](#) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](#) and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](#).

# The Problem of Homosexuality: Desire-in-Uneasiness, Friendship, Family, Freedom

Brian Bergen-Aurand

*Dance in your blood,  
Dance, when you're perfectly free.*

~Rumi (1207-1273)

*As far back as I remember, to want guys [garçons] was to want relations with guys. That has always been important to me. Not necessarily in the form of a couple but as a matter of existence: how is it possible for men to be together? To live together, to share their time, their meals, their room, their leisure, their grief, their knowledge, their confidences? What is it to be “naked” among men, outside of institutional relations, family, profession, and obligatory camaraderie? It's a desire, an uneasiness, a desire-in-uneasiness that exists among a lot of people.*

~Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life”

*Zenne Dancer* is a 2011 Turkish film written by Caner Alper and produced and directed by Alper and Mehmet Binay, first-time filmmakers who have been in a relationship together for more than 15 years. *Zenne* depicts the story of Ahmet Yildiz, a gay Kurdish Turk allegedly murdered by his father in 2008 for dishonoring his family. It is a heady mix of realism and fantasy (or dance and fairytale, as it asserts in the end) addressing the difficulties of refashioning and reimagining oneself simultaneously inside the competing contexts of friendship, kinship, state control, and cultural traditions and outside of institutional relations, family, profession, and obligatory camaraderie. Its story focuses on the relations among three men. Daniel Bert is a German photojournalist visiting Istanbul to escape the trauma of his past,

Can Ozturk is a practicing *zenne* (male belly dancer), hiding from military conscription, and Ahmet is an absentee student, an internal refugee come to Istanbul from the Southeast of Turkey, who is also trying to evade his military service. Its discourse depicts the wider, intersecting circles of these three men, underscoring the relations among their friends, comrades, families, and enemies through remarkable displays of color and contrast, stunning costuming and makeup, a vibrant musical score, and a calligraphic narrative structure that traces the micropolitics of relations with guys as a matter of existence within a larger biopolitics of living together. Concerned with an ethics of homosexuality, it is a film that brings together this desire and uneasiness, this “desire-in-uneasiness” Foucault describes in “Friendship as a Way of Life.”

We first meet Can in a flamboyant stage performance. His costume is spectacular and his dance is impressive. He is confident and alluring at the center of attention on stage. Afterward, when we see him in his dressing room, he is rude and condescending toward his hirsute admirer Ahmet and aloof to Daniel, who asks if Can would agree to model for a magazine shoot. Daniel agrees to pay Can, so Can tolerates him. Later, we learn that Can lives with his supportive aunt and her macho (but supportive) boyfriend, can only arrange cautious visits with his loving mother (who is the widow of a Turkish army hero), and tries to get along with his brother who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and alcoholism after serving in the military in the South of Turkey, fighting against the Kurdish resistance. Can is hiding from his mandatory military service and struggling to design, direct, and perform his own shows. Ahmet is sharing an apartment with his sister, and can avoid military service while in school. Once he graduates, his father and mother—who are struggling to maintain what they see as honest and dignified lives—call on him to bring him back to run the family business. However,

Ahmet and Daniel have fallen in love, and Ahmet and Can have decided (after much debate) to come out as gay and produce the evidence necessary to exempt them from service—explicit photographs of them being anally penetrated, a common conflation, of course, of object-choice and act-choice. [The film asserts that only this exact evidence will exempt the men. It also implies that the men must look “gay” or “perverted” when they arrive to petition for exemption.] The three men have become best friends by this point, and Daniel agrees to help Ahmet with his exemption and his emigration to Germany. Ahmet puts his sister on a bus out of town, and the three men proceed to the induction center, where they are humiliated and ridiculed for being queer and not wanting to serve their country. They are granted exemptions. Back in their family home, Ahmet’s parents are confronted by copies of the visual evidence and outraged. His mother demands her husband be “man enough” to preserve the family honor and gives her husband a handgun. On a quiet street in Istanbul, Ahmet is carrying two ice cream cones when he suddenly stops, cries out “Dad!” and is shot dead. In the closing moments of the film, an intertitle reads, “In 2009, *Der Spiegel* magazine claimed the Turkish military is in possession of the largest pornographic collection in Europe.”

Considering the queer content, elaborate form, and intertwined ethical and political concerns of *Zenne Dancer*, some comparisons seem readily apparent. Alper and Binay’s film echoes the life-work of Jean Genet and certain films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder—especially his adaptation of Genet’s work in the 1982 film *Querelle*. It reflects almost all of Pedro Almodóvar’s cinema including its most flamboyant elements—and most notably his 1999 film about performance, performativity, and embodiment, *All About My Mother*. In addition, thinking *Zenne Dancer* through Genet opens comparisons as well to the films of Todd Haynes, particularly the “Homo” chapter of his 1991 *Poison*, which is a tribute to Genet. Furthermore,

Alper and Binay combine a complex film style with a certain post-secular spirituality (denoted by their film's evocation of Rumi, the thirteenth-century Persian Sufi mystic who often discussed excess and desire-in-uneasiness) in addressing their ethical-political point of view. Such a tack locates them within certain Turkish aesthetic and cinematographic traditions, including the disputed history of "queer Turkish cinema" and most markedly the post-secular films of Turkish Cypriot director Derviş Zaim, such as *Cenneti Beklerken* (Waiting for Heaven, 2006), *Nokta* (2007), and *Gölgeler ve Suretler* (Shadows and Faces, 2010). These comparisons mark *Zenne Dancer* as an important example of glocal queer cinema, at the intersection of several lines of cinema by queer men attempting to engage with the "desire-in-uneasiness" that complicates friendship as a way of life.

Even before its theatrical release in January of 2012, *Zenne Dancer* featured prominently at several festivals and began winning awards and recognitions internationally. It premiered at the 48th Antalya Golden Orange International Film Festival in October 2011 and was the opening film at KUIRFEST Ankara, Turkey's first LGBT Film Festival in November. Since then, it has screened at TEL QUELS Belgium, the Turkish Film Festival Munich, the Torino GLBT Film Festival, the Tel Aviv International Film Festival, the San Francisco Frameline Film Festival, the Paris Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, The Rio de Janeiro International Film Festival, Mix Brazil Sao Paulo, the Perspectives Film Festival Singapore, and more than twenty other international film festivals, including a number in smaller cities throughout Turkey and Germany. The film won the top prize at Antalya, the Human Rights and Democracy Best Feature Awards at Nuremberg, the Audience Best Feature Award at Amsterdam, and shared top honors at LET'S CEE in Vienna.

International critical response to *Zenne Dancer* has been overwhelmingly positive in favor of the film's exposure of contemporary homosexual culture in metropolitan Turkey, the military and police's abusive and humiliating role against that culture, and the links between the state, family, and traditional values in oppressing gays and lesbians in Turkey. Critics have cited the film for its aesthetic and critical resistance to patriarchal and heteronormative dominance, some referring to it as a public statement on homosexuality that becomes a public statement on democracy, a crucial chapter in the contemporary struggle for minority rights. Others have written about it as a plea for liberation, an essay on identity politics, difference, resistance, acceptance, and tolerance. Most have situated the film as a progressive statement in favor of increasing awareness of multiculturalism in Turkey, if not an outright call for acknowledging the full pluralism of contemporary Turkish society.

For example, writing for *The Guardian*, Elif Shafak highlights the film's progressive recipe for a more liberal, more democratic Turkey:

Turkey itself is often polarised with too many social and cultural gaps to fill, and too many biases to overcome. One wonders how things would be different, and more democratic, if only more people were to share the same space with those who are different to themselves, and realise their similarities. But at least there are signs that things are slowly changing for Turkey's gay and transsexual people, if not out on the streets, then at least in the media and public discourse.

Similarly, in a piece for Reuters, Ece Toksabay cites co-director Mehmet Binay, who "said he hoped the movie would help to change views both among government officials and the wider society, but believed that it would not happen overnight. 'These movies will be made in Turkey

as long as those from different identities refuse to learn to live together.’” As well, writing for CNN, Ivan Watson asserts,

LGBT activists are lobbying the Turkish government to have the constitution amended to protect the rights of Turks on the grounds of gender and sexual identity. The Turkish Constitution is currently in the lengthy process of being re-written.

Binay, meanwhile, points to what he calls remarkable progress for minority rights in Turkey over the last decade. He said: “All sorts of minorities including gays and lesbians are demanding their rights. They want recognition, they want protection by the state. They want to be able to live, first of all, and not be murdered.

Critics writing for Turkish publications in particular, such as Emrah Güler for *Hürriyet Daily News*, also discuss the film in terms of its progressive politics and dialogue between the government and wider (more diverse) Turkish society. For these critics, too, the film is a statement from the homosexual community on the need for reform throughout Turkey, especially in the contexts of the relations among patriarchy, homosexuality, masculinity. According to Güler,

Based on the true story of Ahmet Yildiz, a gay man murdered by his father in 2008 after coming out to his family, the film openly deals with cultural and legal issues through three characters, an out-and-about flamboyant dancer, a gay man coming from eastern Turkey and a German photojournalist whose point of view serves as the questioning eye on [the] many guises of patriarchy that haunt gay men.

In addition to these concerns, though, Turkish critics have also seen *Zenne Dancer*, as an important intersection between Turkish film and Turkish society in terms of the question of the existence of a gay Turkish cinema. Güler continues:

“‘Zenne’ is a very special film for us,” said Umut Güner, spokesperson for Kaos GL, an LGBT organization, and writer for Kaos GL magazine. “It brings to the screen some of the important issues for the LGBT cause such as hate crimes, the complications for gay men to forego mandatory military service and coming out.... The film stands in an important place where cinema and the LGBT movement in Turkey meet.”

The film raises the question of whether or not Turkish gay cinema exists or has ever existed. While some writers have labeled *Zenne Dancer* the first gay themed Turkish film, Güner and others have been more cautious in their evaluation of just where *Zenne Dancer* fits in the history of Turkish and Turkish-German cinema addressing questions of gender and sexuality. Güler closes his article,

With merely a dozen examples in the history of Turkish cinema, we can hardly talk about the existence of a gay cinema, let alone an accurate and honest portrayal of gay characters and LGBT communities in general. Güner’s words ring true for a cinema that could hopefully change with the mainstream popularity of “Zenne Dancer”: “Turkish cinema doesn’t acknowledge the existence of LGBT communities, and neither does it look at their problems.”<sup>1</sup>

In their appraisals of *Zenne Dancer*, then, what these articles (foreign and domestic) share is a concern over the distance between the homosexual community and the rest of society in Turkey, the gap between heteronormative and homonormative sexualities. They concentrate on exposing the opposition between an inside and outside, as if the two sides are not already products of one social articulation that is able to define normative and non-normative sexualities only in oppositional terms.

Put another way, one of the social concepts *Zenne Dancer* addresses but responses to it have elided is the very question of the foundation and function of a coherent homosexual community, of *homosexual* community as coherent, and as a marker of coherence. This claim is not to imply that the film depicts a fractured and fractious group of gay men who do not constitute a community. Rather, it is to raise the “problem of homosexuality” as the problem of defining any coherent community in positive terms, of defining and delimiting this homosexual community without recourse to the false dichotomy of opposing gay communities to straight ones, or even gay ones to the state that prohibits or outlaws them. The film certainly does not oppose gay and straight communities, gay and state communities, nor male and female communities. Instead, it engages with the very question of the relation between these interconnected communities. It asks how unclear are the boundaries that demarcate these groups, implying that heteronormative forces function to produce homonormativity through delimitation, cooptation, and dissemination in order to realize the regime of normative heteropatriarchy. To make these claims is to repeat Foucault’s assertion that power is productive: “Power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (*Discipline*, 194). Furthermore, such a discursive project marks what is recognizable and what is not recognizable:

Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse compartments may be realized. (“The Subject and Power” XXX)

Likewise, following Foucault, Judith Butler explains in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*,

The public sphere is constituted in part by what cannot be said and cannot be shown. The limits of the sayable, the limits of what can appear, circumscribe the domain in which political speech operates and certain kinds of subjects appear as viable actors. (xvii)

Foucault and Butler's argument then, is that modern institutions exercise power, rather than violence, to constrain the field of possible ways of being recognizable or comprehensible while leaving the means of realizing those possibilities unbound. What is *said* must be said in a certain way to make sense. Homosexuality, for example, is not repressed but is defined by heterosexuality as a set of recognizable practices seen as inversions of heterosexuality. Of course, by this logic, then, the same applies to heterosexuality, which exists only as an inversion of homosexuality.

In *Zenne Dancer*, the social forces and the state do not deny nor forbid homosexuality as much as they define and delimit it, producing normative homosexuality, and this is why, as Foucault cautions, “we must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes,’ it ‘represses,’ it ‘censors,’ it ‘abstracts,’ it ‘masks,’ it ‘conceals’” (*Discipline*, 194). In the same way as marriage, kinship ties, and shared financial obligations produce recognizable heterosexuality, then, *Zenne Dancer* asserts that state and institutional mandates produce recognizable, normative homosexuality. It is the Turkish military that recognizes only certain sex acts as constitutive of homosexuality, an overt classification the film shows does not exist within the “homosexual community” itself. Thus, it is the Turkish military and familial institutions that bound the problem of homosexuality. In this way, the film

problematizes homosexuality and masculinity precisely because it problematizes heterosexual masculinity and femininity as the problem of homosexuality.

The problem of external recognition reflects back the problem of internal coherence with regard to homosexuality, masculinity, and friendship among men. For example, in the film we get three very different “homosexuals” at the start (and several more later in the story). Can is flamboyant, out, and prone to fantasy. Daniel is bearish, bisexual, liberal middle class, and utopic. Ahmet is curious and questioning; Can accuses him of not knowing how to be gay, and we are not sure he has any sexual experience prior to his relations with Daniel. What the film draws out is this internal incoherence reflective of the external paradox. It is not a question of internalization in a psychological sense, although that is part of the film’s critique. Rather, it is precisely this question of, following Foucault, the problem of the relation between the obstinance of recognizing homosexuality and the work of becoming homosexual, the problem of friendship between men. The problem of homosexuality is always bound to the problem of friendship not only the problem of the State or recognition in the public sphere. It is not only the problem of producing the recognizable or sayable toward the outside, but also doing so toward the inside, and in a way that navigates the dynamic that creates the very distinction between the inside and outside while marking that distinction. Such outside recognition matters but is always already a problem of that which (in more Derridean language) “gives distinction.”

There is no intrinsic quality of homosexuality (or masculinity) but only a sexed and gendered presentation engendered by an extrinsic classification—here the military and familial institutions. Thus, *Zenne Dancer* bends us toward Foucault’s questions:

How is it possible for men to be together? To live together, to share their time, their meals, their room, their leisure, their grief, their knowledge, their confidences? What is

it to be “naked” among men, outside of institutional relations, family, profession, and obligatory camaraderie? (136)

Indeed, it is possible to suggest that this questioning is precisely the “desire-in-uneasiness” that lingers in response to these questions concerning men being together. In fact, as Foucault continues in “Friendship as a Way of Life,” he cautions it might be better to bend the questions. Perhaps, the very problem of homosexuality is that it bends the questions:

Perhaps it would be better to ask oneself, ““What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated?”” The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one’s sex, but, rather, to use one’s sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships. And, no doubt, that’s the real reason why homosexuality is not a form of desire but something desirable. Therefore, we have to work at becoming homosexuals and not be obstinate in recognizing that we are. The development toward which the problem of homosexuality tends is the one of friendship. (XXXX)

It remains a question of ethics and epistemology. If we persist in an epistemological drive to discover the truth of homosexuality, we return always to the paradox of the limits set by heterosexual institutions, which themselves are founded on setting those very limits that “give distinction.” However, if we follow Can in helping Ahmet fashion himself as a Zenne Dancer, in working to become homosexuals, in working to become friends, we see the problem of queer men living their lives do not stem first from their sexual desires and practices but from their life practices. Dancing, eating, lying, living with others dominate their experiences most.

\* \* \*

Of course, *Zenne Dancer* is also a film that addresses in the end the question of honor killings, and in its address of honor killings, *Zenne Dancer* follows in a prestigious line of some of the best of Turkish and world cinema. (*Yol* (1981) may be the most famous Turkish film to address the topic.) Importantly, though, there are differences here.

First, *Zenne Dancer* depicts the story of a father killing his son, rather than his daughter, to preserve family honor.

Second, rather than pitting the modern state against traditional religion, *Zenne Dancer*'s critique of honor killing implicates both the police and the military in the violence done in the name of tradition (not religion). Despite the assumed frame of Turkey's 99% Muslim population, Islam plays a much smaller part than economic deprivation or the trauma of war in this story.

Third, the film complicates gendered expectations through its deployment of female characters—mothers, sisters, lovers—who all have their own relationships with and perspectives on these men. The film shows us patriarchy is a system harmful to women *and* men, and that men *and* women enforce and challenge it. In the same way that *Zenne Dancer* has the potential to bend our understanding of the problem of homosexuality, it also has the potential to bend our understanding of the problems of patriarchy and masculinity.

In the end, *Zenne Dancer* connects these thematic concerns through a mixture of realist story, dance video, daydream, fairytale, and melodrama in a film ultimately concerned with the care of the self and the meaning of liberation in relation to the post-secular framework established from the opening Rumi citation.

There is an iconic image from Turkish cinema, the only image of Turkish cinema many may know. Seyit Ali Firat (Tarik Akan) carries his wife Zine (Serif Sezer) on his back over a

snow-covered mountain pass outside the village of Siirt. A close up of the couple shows their heads and shoulders. Seyit wears a coat and a hat. A scarf is tied around his face. Zine is wrapped in a threadbare scarf blanket. Her hands are bare against the wind and cold. Seyit stares past the camera at the path ahead; Zine's face is clenched in fear and pain, her brow furrowed against the elements. She looks exhausted and could fall from her husband's shoulders at any moment. Seyit is not struggling to rescue his wife from the frozen mountain scene. He is taking her there to die—carrying her to the mountaintop to abandon her to her death in revenge for Zine's turning to sex work to provide for her son in Seyit's absence. The image comes from a scene near the end of *Yol* (1981), written by Yilmaz Güney (while in prison) and directed by Serif Gören, according to Güney's instructions, and framing *Zenne Dancer* with regard to *Yol* and other films concerned with honor killing turns the question of the desire-in-uneasiness of friendship among men together again.

Summarizing her analysis of Turkish films addressing gender and sexuality in relation to a morality that seems in transition in *Turkish Cinema: Identity, Distance and Belonging*, Dönmez-Colin writes:

Despite the bleak picture these films paint, there has been significant openness in recent years regarding sexuality and alternative sexual choices. Sexual freedom for women is still relative and honor killings *do* exist, but at least in the urban milieu the younger women have better opportunities than previous generations to take charge of their bodies, their careers, their emotions and their intellect. (177)

While the terms may be differ for women and for men, and for heterosexuals and homosexuals, and *Zenne Dancer* certainly address some ways in which they relate through this difference, Dönmez-Colin's assessment is telling as well for men, and especially gay men, in Turkey. In

specific ways, sexual freedom for men is still relative and honor killings *of men* do also exist. Again, while heteronormativity and patriarchy do not affect men and women in identical ways, the distinction it draws between different bodies is precisely what draws them together in the paradox of their classifications. *Yol* depicts not only the honor killing of Zine but also of Mehmet, a man whose actions led to the death of his brother-in-law. *Mutluluk* (Bliss, 2007) is another film addressing honor killing. Again, though, it twists the expected narrative when the woman who “loses her honor” when she is raped escapes the village, and her father kills the village leader who attacked his daughter. Another recent film that resonates with *Zenne Dancer* is the 2012 *Ateşin Düştüğü Yer* (Where the Fire Burns), which also deploys a complicated kinship relationship where a father is charged with killing the daughter he dearly loves to redeem the family. Here, again, the affect of honor pulls across bodies in a way that blurs the institutional distinctions (opening the paradox of their foundations) among sexes, genders, and sexual desires. “Honor” and “honor killing” return to the problem of homosexuality precisely because their displacement blurs these distinctions.

Veering toward Bourdieu and his *Masculine Domination*, we read that although Bourdieu is more specifically addressing rape and gang rape, his point stresses the relationship of honor as one between men; one loses one’s honor before men, one loses one’s place in the world of men.

Like honor—or shame, its reverse side, which we know, in contrast to guilt, is felt *before others*—manliness must be validated by other men, in its reality as actual or potential violence, and certified by recognition of membership of the group of “real men”...Practices such as gang rapes—a degraded variant of the group visit to the brothel, so common in the memoirs of bourgeois adolescents—are designed to

challenge those under test to prove *before others* their virility in its violent reality, in other words stripped of all the devirilizing tenderness and gentleness of love, and they dramatically demonstrate the heteronomy of all affirmations of virility, their dependence on the judgement of the male group....

....What is called “courage” is thus rooted in a kind of cowardice: one has only to think of all the situations in which, to make men kill, torture and rape, the will to dominate, exploit or oppress has relied on the “manly” fear of being excluded from the world of “men” without weakness.... Manliness, it can be seen, is an eminently *relational* notion, constructed in front of and for other men and against femininity, in a kind of fear of the female, firstly in oneself. (52-53)

Honor is relational and dependent upon relations among men, in front of other men. This relational honor/shame is deployed in all these films about honor killing that do not depict the lone gunman out for revenge but rather structures set on resolving (not addressing) the problem of homosexuality through distinction, by returning to cohesion. In *Yol*, the women are in charge of condemning Zine. In *Zenne Dancer*, Ahmet’s mother gives his father the gun and demands the father be “man enough” to redeem their family name. The fear is not only that sexual relations will spoil the recognizable or comprehensible arrangements between bodies within social structure, but also that friendship must be distinct as well. Thus, honor remains pure only as all other relations remain distinct.

In *Zenne Dancer*, when Ahmet demands of his sister, “Can’t I have friends?” She responds, “Friends, sure. I’d watch out, if I were you.” Her caution is not that he cannot have friends, but that the line between friendship and any other relation must not twist, bend, or blur. In a similar vein, Ahmet’s mother scolds her husband precisely for his own twisting and

bending when she says, “I’d give you another son if you were man enough.” Manliness is relational and distinct from friendship and must avoid anything that might diminish its distinction. The problem of homosexuality is that its own incoherence threatens to warp the distinctions of all the other relations founded in distinction from it.

According to Bourdieu,

Manliness, virility, in its ethical aspect, i.e. as the essence of *vir*, *virtus*, the point of honor [*nif*], the principle of the conservation and increase of honor, remains indissociable, tacitly at least, from physical virility, in particular through the attestations of sexual potency—deflowering of the bride, abundant male offspring, etc.—which are expected of a “real” man. Hence the phallus, always metaphorically present but very rarely, named, concentrates all the collective fantasies of fecundating potency. (12)

The fantasy of masculinity is linked to the fantasy of virility, of the negation of desire-in-uneasiness, a desire not easily delimited, let alone excluded. In fact, the problem of homosexuality may be even more prevalent in the realm of virility, as Derrida claims in *The Politics of Friendship*:

What relation does this domination maintain with the double exclusion we see at work in all the great ethico-politico-philosophical discourses on friendship; on the one hand, the exclusion of friendship between women; on the other, the exclusion of friendship between a man and a woman? This double exclusion of the feminine in this philosophical paradigm would then confer on friendship the essential and essentially sublime figure of virile homosexuality. (278-9)

The double exclusion of friendship, then, bends the distinction between virility and homosexuality, reflecting the very problem of homosexuality back onto masculinity,

patriarchy, heteronormativity, and other systems founded on their distinction from this distinction. Friendship between men and women is complicated in *Zenne Dancer*, as Daniel's female friend is actually interested in him as a lover, Ahmet seems to have no female friends and hardly a friendship with his sister, and Can is close to his aunt and mother but not quite friends.

And yet, Bourdieu does make a space for a different engendering of friendship, family, and freedom that does not rely upon the problems of coherence and distinction that are the problem of homosexuality. Near the end of *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu writes of a different world, built upon "the suspension of power relations which seems constitutive of the experience of love or friendship" (110). Love or friendship, already the distinctions blur.

Bourdieu continues,

This is a world of non-violence, made possible by the establishment of relations based on full *reciprocity* and authorizing the abandonment and entrusting self; a world of mutual recognition, which makes it possible, as Sartre says, to feel "justified in existing", accepted, even in one's most contingent or most negative particularities, in and by the arbitrary absolutizing of the arbitrariness of an encounter ("because it was him, because it was me"); the world of the *disinterestedness* which makes possible deinstrumentalized relations, based on the happiness of giving happiness, of finding in the wonderment of the other, especially at the wonder he or she arouses, inexhaustible reasons for wonder. (110)

Bourdieu returns to paradigms of recognition and reciprocity, here, that complicate his ethics by relating them back to epistemology. However, his fantasy, his utopic suggestion here returns as well to the proposition of *Zenne Dancer* in the end. As the narrator of the story says at the

end, this film has been a fairytale it would have begun and ended very differently. But this is not a fairy tale. But what if it had been? How might the relations among this unlikely trio of friends been quite different?

Bourdieu concludes,

Breaking away from the instability and insecurity characteristic of the dialectic of honor which, although based on a premise of equality, is always exposed to domineering rivalry, the loving subject can obtain recognition only from another subject, but one which, like himself or herself, abdicates the intention of dominating. He or she freely hands his or her freedom to a master who in turn hands over his or her own, coinciding with him or her in an act of free alienation that is indefinitely asserted (through the non-redundant repetition of “I love you”). He or she has the experience of being a quasi-divine creator who makes, *ex nihilo*, the beloved, through the power that he or she grants him or her (in particular the power of *naming*, manifested in all the unique and secret names that lovers give each other and which, as in an initiatory ritual, mark a new birth, an absolute first beginning, a change of ontological status); but a creator who, in return and simultaneously, unlike an egocentric and dominating Pygmalion, accepts to be the creature of his creature. (111-12)

Here, Bourdieu turns from the ethics of recognition and reciprocity to bridge the gap between, blur the distinction between Foucault and Derrida with regard to the problem or exclusion of homosexuality. The loving subject can obtain recognition only from another subject. Indeed, perhaps it is the question of this acceptance “to be the creature of his creature” Ahmet is asking when he asks, “Can’t I have friends?” Perhaps, as well, this is the invocation of Rumi that whispers throughout the film, Rumi who writes,

Why should I seek? I am the same as he.

His essence speaks through me.

I have been looking for myself.

The problem of homosexuality here is not the problem of distinction but the problem of a desire for distinction to form this relation in difference, this recognizable separation with which to found and which founds exclusion. Identity as identity *from* is erased.

In the end, as the film opens with a fragment of this poem from Rumi, it may be appropriate to close this paper with the complete poem, noting the uneasiness, the desire, the desire-in-uneasiness evoked and displaced by touch in the poem.

Dance, when you're broken open.

Dance, if you've torn the bandage off.

Dance in the middle of the fighting.

Dance in your blood.

Dance, when you're perfectly free.

He Embraced Me Like His Own Soul

My beloved caressed me yesterday

and let me,

who has tasted nothing but sorrow,

taste his soul.

He gave wisdom to my mind

and put an earring in my ear.  
He gave light to my eyes  
and brought sweetness to my taste.

He spoke to me:  
“One who’s become wasted  
because of me,  
One who is afraid of me,  
know that I’m kind.  
I would never sell a slave I’ve bought.”

Look and see  
how he does help,  
the differences he makes.  
Joseph remembers the ones  
who cut off their hands for him.

He embraced me like his own soul.  
My doubts and ill feelings left me.  
He put his beautiful face on my shoulder.

The speaker addresses an outside listener in describing an ethics of homosexuality here, not so much the epistemological work of defining and recognizing homosexuality comprehensively but of becoming homosexual, of becoming friends.

Through *Zenne Dancer*, Caner Alper and Mehmet Binay essay relations between men; they address the combination of desire and uneasiness, the “desire-in-uneasiness,” that provokes the question of *how is it possible for men to be together*, the problem of homosexuality in relation to friends, family, and freedom. Since *Zenne Dancer*, they have been working to complete the film *Çekmeceler* (Drawers), scheduled to be released in March 2015. According to a July 2014 blurb in the Turkish newspaper *Today’s Zaman*, this new film “tackles the subject of female sexuality through the story of a woman who suffers from physical and mental injuries as a result of her parents’ complexes.” Again, the filmmakers appear have turned toward visually and discursively complex and compelling filmmaking in addressing events from recent Turkish history to consider questions of gender, sexuality, and the public sphere in relation to kinship structures. According to *Çekmeceler’s* website (<http://www.cekmecelerfilmi.com/>), Deniz (Ece Dizdar) is taken to the hospital on the traumatic night of her thirty-second birthday and begins to relive the events of the past twenty-five years. From the online synopsis and trailer, the film seems concerned with childhood abandonment, patriarchal control, childhood sexuality, personal exploration and discovery, and “her painful but liberating journey” through which “she manages to discover herself and furthermore the hidden secrets in her family drawers.” Returning to *The Politics of Friendship*, we are reminded of series of questions concerning ethics, politics, friendship, gender and sexuality Derrida disseminates:

The principal question would rightly concern the hegemony of a philosophical canon in this domain: how has it prevailed? Whence derives its force? How has it been able to exclude the feminine or heterosexuality, friendship between women or friendship between men and women? Why can an essential inventory not be made of feminine or

heterosexual experiences of friendship? Why this heterogeneity between *éros* and *philia*? (277)

Perhaps the problem of heterosexuality will be the subject of Alper and Binay's next film.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arslan, Savas. *Cinema in Turkey: A New Critical History*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Masculine Domination*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge: Polity, 2001.
- Çekmeceler website. <http://www.cekmecelerfilmi.com/>. 1 Dec 2014.
- Derrida, Jacques. *The Politics of Friendship*. Trans. George Collins. London: Verso, 1997.
- Dönmez-Colin, Gönül, ed. *The Cinema of North Africa and the Middle East*. 24 Frames. London: Wallflower, 2007.
- Turkish Cinema: Identity, Distance and Belonging*. London: Reaktion Books, 2008.
- Women, Islam and Cinema*. Locations. London: Reaktion Books, 2004.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage.
- "Friendship as a Way of Life." *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. Ed. Paul Rainbow. Trans. John Johnston. New York: The New Press, 1994. 135-40.
- Hélie, Anissa and Homa Hoodfar, eds. *Sexuality in Muslim Context: Restrictions and Resistance*. London: Zed Books, 2012.
- Honour Based Violence Awareness Network. <<http://hbv-awareness.com/>>. 12 April 2013. Online.

Kiliçbay, Baris. "Queer as Turk: A Journey to Three Queer Melodramas." *Queer Cinema in Europe*. Ed. Robin Griffiths. Bristol: Intellect, 2008. 117-28.

Morris, Chris. *The New Turkey: The Quiet Revolution on the Edge of Europe*. London: Granta, 2005.

Safi, Omid, ed. *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2003.

Suner, Asuman. *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity and Memory*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2010.

*Zenne Dancer* website. <http://www.zennethemovie.com/>. 1 May 2013.

"'Zenne' co-directors' New Film Set for 2015 Release." *Today's Zaman*. 14 July 2014.

[http://www.todayszaman.com/arts-culture\\_zenne-co-directors-new-film-set-for-2015-release\\_353032.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/arts-culture_zenne-co-directors-new-film-set-for-2015-release_353032.html). 1 December 2014.

<sup>1</sup> Umut Güner is a spokesperson for Kaos GL, an LGBT organization in Turkey, and writer for *Kaos GL* magazine.